



Depression and Bipolar  
Support Alliance

# UNDERSTANDING AGITATION

Welcome to the DBSA Understanding Agitation Kit, designed to introduce emergency departments, hospitals, and other community health organizations to best practices in working with individuals experiencing agitation. These resources will help you and your staff begin to develop the knowledge and skills to safely, effectively, and collaboratively manage and prevent the escalation of agitation episodes in your patients.

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1.7 million medical emergency room visits in the US per year may involve patients experiencing agitation, and consensus guidelines have been developed specific to the emergency setting. Implementing these recommendations, including verbal de-escalation, avoiding coercion, and setting up an environment conducive to comfort and safety for both staff and patients, will improve outcomes by engaging the patient in a therapeutic alliance.

DBSA believes that having the patient perspective at the center of conversations about mental health results in better outcomes and we are dedicated to building tools such as this kit to foster the patient-clinician partnership.

The tools in this kit include:

- Understanding Agitation Basic Information sheet
- Six article series from the *Western Journal of Emergency Medicine* detailing guidelines developed through the best available research and expert consensus panel, organized by the American Association for Emergency Psychiatry
- Educational poster
- Reference cards for clinicians and staff detailing effective interpersonal calming skills known as verbal de-escalation
- *Understanding Agitation* brochures and crisis planning cards to provide to patients
- Order form to request additional posters, reference cards, and patient resources free of charge.

Visit [DBSAlliance.org/UnderstandingAgitationKit](https://DBSAlliance.org/UnderstandingAgitationKit) to access videos and supplemental resources including a demonstration of verbal de-escalation. You will also find digital versions of each resource included in this kit.

Please consider completing an evaluation of this kit to help us continue to enhance our programs.

DBSA thanks Teva for their support for production, not content development, of this educational resource. DBSA would also like to thank Scott Zeller, MD for his guidance in the creation of these educational materials.



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# UNDERSTANDING AGITATION

## Basic Information

### Patients Experiencing Agitation

Agitation is very common in the emergency setting. A person experiencing agitation may pace, wring their hands, or talk excessively. As an episode escalates, the person may begin to show poor impulse control, become uncooperative, or, in some cases, show hostility. These behaviors can be challenging for staff and clinicians to deal with, and all too often patients experiencing agitation are forcibly restrained and injected with sedative medications.

What is forgotten in this model is that at the center of the invention is a person who is often vulnerable and frightened due to their symptoms and the environment around them. The experience of agitation is the psychiatric equivalent of a terrible headache, and patients experiencing agitation usually want relief from this extreme discomfort. Many will react positively to collaboration and empathy, whereas the “restrain and sedate” model can be traumatizing to patients and staff.

### A New Paradigm in the Treatment of Agitation

The American Association for Emergency Psychiatry embarked on Project BETA: Best practices in Evaluation and Treatment of Agitation to establish quality guidelines in the treatment of agitation which are effective, safe, and in the best interests of the patient. These recommendations are based on the best available research and the expert consensus of dozens of seasoned clinicians in both psychiatry and emergency medicine.

Findings show that forcible interventions can often be easily avoided in a safer, faster way, and patient-centered interventions improve short-and long-term outcomes. These recommendations center on establishing a collaborative relationship and highlight interpersonal techniques as key to avoiding seclusion and restraint, helping the patient regain control so they can best communicate their needs to clinicians.

### Summary of Consensus Recommendations

In its six-article series in the *Western Journal of Emergency Medicine*, the Project BETA researchers outline recommendations for working with people experiencing agitation. The guidelines include the full spectrum of interventions, including triage, medical evaluation, psychiatric evaluation, verbal de-escalation, and medications. The full articles are included in this toolkit, but here are some highlights:

- Verbal de-escalation can achieve patient collaboration much faster than using coercive strategies and should almost always be attempted
- Voluntary oral medications are preferable to injectable medications
- Programs to reduce the rate of restraints often have fewer staff injuries, as two thirds of staff injuries occur during containment procedures for restraint
- Avoiding the restraint process can improve throughput as many receiving facilities resist taking patients who are sedated or recently restrained



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## Learn More

At [DBSAAlliance.org/UnderstandingAgitationKit](https://DBSAAlliance.org/UnderstandingAgitationKit) you will find:



- De-escalation demonstration video
- 



- Webinar on agitation presented by Dr. Scott Zeller, founder and director of Project BETA
- 



- Video to help you understand the perspective of the individual experiencing agitation
- 



- Wellness tools to provide your patients
- 



- Electronic versions of all resources in this toolkit



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## Evaluation

Your feedback is very helpful for planning and improving our programs and resources. For your convenience we have included a return envelope to submit your evaluation. This evaluation can also be completed at [DBSAAlliance.org/AgitationKitEvaluation](https://DBSAAlliance.org/AgitationKitEvaluation) or by scanning the QR code on this form with your smartphone.



### Please rate the following:

	POOR	FAIR	AVERAGE	ABOVE AVERAGE	EXCELLENT
Quality of content	1	2	3	4	5
Utility of content	1	2	3	4	5
Understanding of agitation prior to accessing kit	1	2	3	4	5
Understanding of agitation after accessing this kit	1	2	3	4	5
Capability to put information into action	1	2	3	4	5
Likelihood to change behavior or policies	1	2	3	4	5
Likelihood to use your local DBSA chapter as a resource	1	2	3	4	5

### Please evaluate each kit component that you accessed:

	POOR	FAIR	AVERAGE	ABOVE AVERAGE	EXCELLENT	
Basic Information handout	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Project BETA article series	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Video Series on <a href="https://DBSAAlliance.org/UnderstandingAgitationKit">DBSAAlliance.org/UnderstandingAgitationKit</a>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Webinar	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
De-escalation poster	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
De-escalation cards	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
<i>Understanding Agitation</i> brochure	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Personal Crisis Planning cards	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Interaction with DBSA chapter representative	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

Briefly describe the most important things you learned and will incorporate into your professional work or facility: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Briefly describe any barriers you anticipate as you make these changes: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Briefly describe your thoughts about your local DBSA chapter and whether you will engage with them in the future: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Is there anything you would like to see added to this kit? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Additional comments: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

My overall rating of the kit is (circle one): POOR FAIR AVERAGE ABOVE AVERAGE EXCELLENT

Are you interested in receiving similar resources developed by DBSA in the future? YES / NO

**Optional**

NAME FACILITY

ADDRESS CITY/STATE

EMAIL AND/OR PHONE NUMBER



We've been there.  
We can help.

[DBSAAlliance.org/UnderstandingAgitationKit](https://DBSAAlliance.org/UnderstandingAgitationKit)



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# UNDERSTANDING AGITATION

## Resource Order Form

We are pleased to offer additional copies of the following resources free of charge.

### Resources for Your Staff



#### DE-ESCALATION POSTER

This 11"x17" poster illustrates the best ways to interact with individuals experiencing an agitation episode, based on consensus guidelines from the American Association for Emergency Psychiatry Project BETA. It includes information on body language, helpful phrases, and how to set up the environment for best outcomes.



#### DE-ESCALATION CARDS

Designed as a handy reference for nurses, doctors, security staff, and other employees, each card lists the ten principles of verbal de-escalation. Cards are printed on durable plastic and are the same size as a standard badge.

### Resources for Your Patients



#### UNDERSTANDING AGITATION BROCHURE

This brochure provides education to help patients and loved ones recognize the signs of agitation and know what to do when they appear. It also addresses prevention, treatment, and how to talk with doctors about agitation.



#### PERSONAL CRISIS PLANNING CARDS

This card will easily fit in a wallet or pocket, and guides patients through a series of questions to indicate their preferences in the case of a future crisis. It includes space to write names and numbers of people to call for help, as well as preferred treatments/medications.

### Shipping Information:

AGENCY NAME

AGENCY CONTACT

STREET ADDRESS

CITY/STATE

ZIP CODE

PHONE

EMAIL    WOULD YOU LIKE TO RECEIVE EMAILS FROM DBSA? YES / NO

### Please send:

\_\_\_\_\_ De-escalation Posters

\_\_\_\_\_ De-escalation Cards

\_\_\_\_\_ *Understanding Agitation Brochure*  
*(available in multiples of 25 brochures)*

\_\_\_\_\_ Personal Crisis Planning Cards  
*(available in multiples of 25 cards)*

### Return completed order form to:

DBSA, Chapter Relations  
55 E Jackson Blvd, Ste 490 Chicago, IL 60604  
Fax: (312) 642-7243